

COLONIAL COMMONS & ASHLEY RIVER EMBANKMENT COMMISSION
CITY OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA
A brief history

In 1768 the Governor as agent for the King of England, Charles Greville Montagu, set aside for the inhabitants of "Charlestowne"... a certain area which "shall forever hereafter be reserved and kept for the use of a common for Charlestowne." The first Commissioners appointed to oversee the creation of a canal from the end of Broad Street to the Ashley River had familiar last names: Drayton, Fenwicke, Lowndes, Mayzck, Middleton and Savage.

In 1881 Commissioners appointed by the mayor met for the first occasion in many years and began a program of management of the Common. The minutes of their meetings until approximately 1952 are preserved in the Charleston County Library special collection. Records of meetings in 1960, 1972, 1975, 1976 and are found outside the bound volume.

In the 1970's the city Parks Department assumed the practical management of the actively used spaces, Colonial Lake and Moultrie Playground, which comprise only a part of the original grant by the crown. The Commissioners continued to be appointed by the mayor but their activity has not been preserved until recently.

In 2006 the Harleston Village Neighborhood Association formed a standing committee to examine conditions specifically at Colonial Lake, which many people thought exhibited neglect and decline under the city's management. This committee comprised of Yvonne Evans, Harlan Greene, Walt Dunlap, Keith Kirkland, David Spell, Ann DeSaussure, Kathy Rackley, David Agnew and Cleave Ham (*ex officio*) first met in September 2006. The committee set to work on a series of objectives and priorities for improvement and maintenance of the Lake. In early 2007 they presented the parks department with a petition seeking an action plan signed by over 400 people in 3 weeks. In October 2007 they organized a Colonial Lake festival which attracted several hundred people to a music and activity fair. This broad support for improvement prompted the newly formed Charleston Parks Conservancy (CPC) executed under their guidance. The committee was thereby dissolved and CPC undertook a partnership for planning with the parks department.

Prompted by citizen request, the mayor re-appointed the Commissioners of the Colonial Common in April 2009. The new Commissioners were: Walter Duane, Walt Dunlap, Keith Kirkland, Kathy Rackley, Ben Moise, David Spell, Michael Master, Wynona Crosby, Harlan Greene and Ann DeSaussure. The mayor appointed the acting director of parks as his proxy.

The duties enumerated in the Municipal Code, Sec. 9-17 are:

"It shall be the duty of the board of commissioners provided for in section 9-16 to carry into effect the decree referred to in such section {by Court of Common Pleas for Charleston County, dated July 5, 1881}, and to have the care and administration of the Colonial Common and Ashley River Embankment, and of all the funds to be expended upon its improvement."

See also "On Common Ground", Nic Butler, Charleston Magazine, July-August 2006